

Desperate measures

by David Newman

21st century security

Because the world changed on September 11, 2001, it follows that government procurement should also be affected by such a dramatic departure point. The impact of the twin towers tragedy in New York on the world of government procurement can be understood from two perspectives: product and process.

New and improved – product, product, product

The crisis hastened innovation and reinforced the market for data and personal communications, but the most obvious impact was on the security industry. That was especially true for electronic communications and operations security. There are important implications for government procurement.

Automated electronic systems have long been part of public sector procurement operations. Many purchasing applications are part of enterprise information technology applications. After all procurement is an integral part of overall management and planning. Events and environments that affect the operation of the organization often have a special effect on procurement activities. This is certainly true of the fallout from 9/11 and how it affects the procurement world.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Canadian government appointed a super-minister in charge of security measures and allocated over \$7 billion to address the vulnerabilities highlighted by the twin towers attack.

Caught in the Net – securing electronic communication

Secure electronic communication is a major focus in the post 9/11 e-world. Indeed, as Government On-Line advances

and procurement itself becomes more automated, secure communication is not only a major area of purchase in itself, but one that affects government procurement processes and systems.

Hans Downer is senior vice-president of Global Professional Services and Canadian Sales for Entrust.

“Initially the post 9/11 focus was around the perimeter of the country, the Coast Guard, RCMP and the US-Canada border. Since then a great deal of support from the public and the public sector has developed for increased security in general, not only physical security, but security involving data networks,” Downer said.

As security measures are introduced, they must be measured against Canadians’ concerns about privacy. “For Entrust this has meant a lot of work relative to a common infrastructure within the IT environment,” Downer said. “We are seeing a lot more interest in our own products because that is our market niche – security of communications and digital identities.”

Specific electronic applications for procurement will depend on secure communication and the Internet. The federal government’s Secure Channel will enable “business to government” procurement applications like registration, secure transmissions and Internet bidding, processing or awarding of contracts.

Downer said the 9/11 crisis led to an understanding in government procurement that we now live in a Web-based world, a world in which communications must be controlled and monitored, even after they have been sent and received. “Products like ours allow governments to communicate more freely, and securely, to people on the front lines – firemen, policemen, doctors

or even buyers for example, who may have Internet access, but not access to some of the higher grade secure networks,” he said. “We learned from 9/11 that crucial information needs to get out to those people very rapidly.”

In the online world of infinite interconnection and easy anonymity, it is critical to verify information sources. Entrust has partnered with Adobe to provide a digital ‘signature’ for the United States Government General Printing Office’s (GPO) daily activities publication. “They want to make sure that everyone understands that it is the GPO that is putting the information on their website, that it is truly official and not the result of someone else hacking their website. So we developed an application that allows anybody to get a free Adobe plug-in to validate that the signature is truly that of the GPO,” Downer said.

Think big – putting the “gee” in global

Procurement specialists will need to think big in the post 9/11 environment and consider global rather than domestic solutions. Requirements will increasingly call for links to other governments’ systems and processes.

“The need for secure communication is growing so rapidly, especially as workforces shrink, that vendors who cannot provide that cross-jurisdictional capability will be disadvantaged in the new information era,” observed Downer. “If you look at organizations like NATO and other worldwide agencies you can see fairly readily how cross-departmental communications fit into a worldwide network.” Canada and the United States are studying border security and police communications. “As we see these

two countries converging with their plans and efforts, we are going to see the very real need for more secure cross-border communications,” he said.

The political implications of greater reliance on common suppliers as government go-betweens are immense:

- Can medium and small business compete within this kind of global enterprise marketplace?
- What will it mean for existing trade agreements and international accords such as the WTO, NAFTA, ASEA or European Common Market?
- What does it do to domestic political policies involving set-asides such as geographic selection, Aboriginal or green procurement policies?
- Are the stakes raised for corporations based in countries that may be “most-favoured” or “least favoured” nations of another?

The “Brave New World” could become one for the very brave indeed, especially for the people making the rules, and judgment-based buying and asset management decisions!

I know what you did last summer – the information cycle

To seize all the benefits of electronic automation, it’s no longer enough to protect documents as they move from point to point. They must be secure throughout their entire life cycle. “Because everybody, business and governments alike, wants to

you are then going to send it to or what you are going to do with it. As we move forward there will be a lot more focus on digital rights management to ensure confidentiality and security of the information itself,” Downer said. “The next generation products will help deal with how information is used once it is sent.”

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share information, the real issue as we go forward is not how you keep people out, but how you let people in and only let them see the stuff you want them to see,” says Downer.

Hans Downer believes digital rights management – defining and restricting what people can do electronically with files and information – is a developing market.

“If I send you an email now with an encrypted signature, you clearly know who sent it, but as a sender, I don’t know who

Public sector procurement specialists must constantly balance privacy and security against transparency and accountability. In the years ahead, they will be among the most demanding customers for the next generation of digital information products. *MM*

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